State and Field Office Responses to a Questionnaire Focusing on BLM's Riparian Program and the Interagency Creeks and Communities Strategy

Introduction

In January 2009, a voluntary programmatic questionnaire was sent to State Office Riparian Program Leads (Appendix A) and randomly selected field offices (Appendix B). This report summarizes the analysis of responses from the questionnaire and identifies opportunities to strengthen the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Riparian Program, the interagency Creeks and Communities Strategy, and the BLM's management of riparian data. The response rate for this questionnaire exceeded 80 percent, indicating a high level of interest and commitment to the Riparian Program at both state and field offices.

Background

The BLM recognized the importance of managing riparian resources, and began a concerted effort to address this critical resource in 1985. The first decade focused on the development of policy and guidance and a program framework called the Riparian-Wetland Initiative for the 1990s. A number of technical references were developed, including the process for assessing the Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) of Riparian Areas, which still serves as a foundation within the BLM's Riparian Program. During this same period, an extensive effort was carried out to train employees BLM-wide and to begin the process of assessing the majority of BLM's riparian resources as the basis for improving management and therefore resource condition. In the mid-1990s an interagency strategy titled Accelerating Cooperative Riparian Restoration and Management was initiated to enhance the effectiveness of the Riparian Program and expand to a cross-jurisdictional framework. Through time, this interagency effort evolved into what is now known as the Creeks and Communities Strategy. The BLM now has a tremendous amount of assessment data and is beginning to accumulate more monitoring data. Currently, a BLM-wide system for managing riparian data does not exist. Data is kept at field offices in many formats prompting the need to determine how best to ensure safe storage and useful retrieval of data into the future.

Questionnaire Results

The BLM has made great strides in managing riparian resources, and steady leadership and innovation over time has had a positive influence across a much broader landscape. As programs continue to evolve, periodic evaluations of relevance and effectiveness are needed. The feedback that resulted from this most recent effort will be used to guide adjustments in program direction and priorities. What follows is a summary of the responses described in terms of findings and recommendations for three categories: the BLM Riparian Program, the Interagency Creeks and Communities Strategy, and Riparian Data Management.

BLM Riparian Program

The Riparian Program is a framework of policy and guidance aimed at achieving riparianwetland condition objectives set forth by the BLM. The framework also incorporates planning, budget, and management activities. Questions covering program management were designed to ascertain if policy and guidance are adequate, the degree of program integration, and to identify the highest program priorities. While respondents addressed these, they replied with information that was more inclusive of specific program elements as reflected in the following findings:

Policy/Direction

Overall there is a general perception that program guidance is adequate; however, it is recognized that some guidance and direction needs updating. Responses also indicate there is some confusion as to the distinction between policy and guidance.

Assessment

Overall offices have completed Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) assessments using Issue Identification (ID) teams. Some PFC assessments are completed as a part of land health assessments. Some offices are reassessing, and others are recognizing the need to reassess. Some field offices are challenged to assemble a full-complement ID team.

Monitoring

Generally, additional data is collected to support PFC assessments. Where it is recognized as a high priority, monitoring is taking place; however, both state and field offices indicate more monitoring is needed.

Communication/Integration

Overall there is good communication between riparian leads and line officers. Generally, there is good integration with fisheries, threatened and endangered (T&E), wildlife, and range staff and somewhat with recreation and oil and gas staff.

In addition, respondents were asked to identify the greatest need and highest priority work.

Priority work identified by state and field offices:

- Resource Management Plans
- Grazing/Permit Renewals
- Monitoring
- Placer Mining (Alaska)

Greatest needs identified by state and field offices:

- Additional monitoring, including an increase in staff and skills
- Additional training, both PFC assessment and riparian monitoring
- Additional skills/effort needed to assess and manage lentic systems

Following are a number of recommendations aimed at addressing some of the findings outlined above. The intent is to be responsive to the priorities and needs of the state and field offices and to strengthen the Riparian Program overall. These include tasks to be accomplished through leadership at the national level as well as activities that provide direct support to field units:

Policy/Direction

- Clarify the policy and guidance relationship
- Restate program goals and objectives using Information Bulletins (IB), Instruction Memorandums (IM), and manual updates
- Develop policy and guidance to increase/improve monitoring activities
- Update technical references as needed

Assessment and Monitoring

- Encourage and facilitate use of interdisciplinary teams for assessments
- Reassess or monitor for validation of riparian conditions meeting standards with focus on:
 - RMP objectives
 - T&E species
 - Grazing permit renewals
 - Placer mining permits (Alaska)
- Ensure training opportunities for PFC and riparian monitoring
- Place an emphasis on lentic assessment and management

Communication/Integration

Continue to foster good coordination at the field office level by improving program integration at the Washington Office.

Interagency Creeks and Communities Strategy

The interagency Creeks and Communities Strategy is an operating framework based on principles and practices for integrating science and technology into collaborative decisionmaking in support of cooperative restoration and management of riparian resources. Questions in this section were designed to ascertain state and field office awareness and understanding of the Creeks and Communities Strategy and utilization of the interagency National Riparian Service Team (NRST) and State Riparian Teams. Responses included the following findings:

Awareness/Understanding

Overall, state office riparian leads have a good understanding of the Creeks and Communities Strategy and are very supportive. Several also serve as leader for their state riparian team. Field office responses include some awareness and understanding to none. A number of responses indicate that field offices equate NRST with PFC, not the West-wide effort of Creeks and Communities. More field offices are aware of the responsibilities of their state teams and know they provide training.

Utilization

Generally, field offices have utilized the NRST for technical transfer and training (capacity building, mentoring) and less for consulting (place-based problem solving), review, and building

capacity for collaboration. Many field office managers and staff do not have a complete understanding of the services provided by the NRST and have not utilized them due to a number of factors. Field offices that have utilized the NRST have found their services valuable. Most state teams are utilized for training, predominantly PFC, and some are beginning to offer riparian grazing and monitoring courses. State and field offices have identified a growing demand for lentic assessment skills.

Below are recommendations to address the findings outlined above and would serve as the basis for more specific actions:

Awareness/Understanding

- Develop a strategy to increase communication to improve understanding of Creeks and Communities, the NRST services, and the state team services
- Implement actions to increase communication and coordination between the NRST, state teams, agency coordinators, and field offices

Utilization

- Foster application of the Creeks and Communities approach to address field office issues
- Encourage state teams to incorporate collaborative problem solving in all training
- Improve NRST, state team, and agency coordinator support of Riparian Program priorities
- Increase training and mentoring to develop deep skills in field office personnel

Riparian Data Management

The BLM is experiencing an increasing need to develop a more consistent way to manage riparian data. Project level use, landscape level assessments, and meeting the objectives of the BLM's Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) strategy demand that a concerted effort be made to advance riparian data management within the BLM. Questions in this section were designed to ascertain the age, type, and quality of data in the field offices, the storage format, and priority for development of a riparian data system. Specific findings follow:

Age, Type and Quality

Most field offices have completed their PFC assessments and state offices expressed confidence in this data. However, quite a bit of the PFC assessment data is 10 to 20 years old. Most field offices are collecting some kind of additional information to support PFC assessments but overall there is insufficient monitoring data to validate conditions.

Format

Most field office riparian data is not stored in an electronic format, and even where it is electronic, data sharing is limited. Some field offices have developed databases with geospatial reference.

Date System Priority

Most state and field offices recognized efficiencies would be gained from a data system and most of the state office program leads prioritized the development of a riparian data system as high or very high.

Below are some recommendations to begin addressing the current riparian data situation upon which a more specific strategy would be based:

- Develop a riparian data system with analytical tools to meet field-, state-, and national-level needs
- Utilize field office subject matter experts to develop system requirements
- Incorporate geospatial reference related to National Hydrography Dataset base layer
- Develop guidance for managing legacy data

Summary

The insights gained through this questionnaire process identify a number of reasons and opportunities to make necessary adjustments to all three areas examined. Responses both affirm aspects already recognized through implementation during the past 10 years, and give a sense of emphasis and priority to others. Effectiveness of the BLM Riparian Program is in part determined by the level of support provided through implementing the Creeks and Communities strategy. Field offices are faced with addressing complex and contentious issues inherent in managing a part of the landscape that provides so many societal values and benefits, and technical issues must be addressed through recognizing and addressing the social context within which the issues exist. As indicated, ensuring workforce skills to meet these challenges is important and a definite area of interface for the Riparian Program and the Creeks and Communities effort. In turn, the Creeks and Communities strategy relies heavily on support and coordination of the Riparian Program in order to provide assistance and be responsive to specific needs while at the same time addressing cooperative stewardship of riparian resources on a West-wide, multi-jurisdictional basis.

Furthermore, the efficiency and credibility of the BLM Riparian Program is reliant on the quality and quantity of riparian data collected, including how available and useable it is. The need for assessment, inventory and monitoring data is increasing as the BLM places more emphasis on restoration and conservation efforts at the landscape level. The progression of steps from policy to implementing decisions, to the data needed to evaluate their effectiveness and then to reporting accomplishments, substantiates the emphasis expressed for development of a national riparian data system.

The findings and recommendations summarized in this report will be used to inform program alignment adjustments, including increased integration. The intent is to ensure the continuation of an effective Riparian Program, one that contributes to the achievement of goals and objectives for a number of BLM programs and initiatives. The same is true for the interagency Creeks and Communities Strategy and the improvement of riparian data management within the BLM. The overall themes and specific focus areas outlined in this report provide a template for moving ahead with the development of an action plan to begin implementing the recommendations.

<u>Appendix A: Questions regarding BLM's Riparian Program and the Creeks and Communities</u> <u>Strategy - State Office Leads</u>

Program Management:

- 1. In your own words, how would you define success for the 1040 program? In 2009? By 2014?
- 2. Do the current policies and procedures as stated in Manual 1737 and the Riparian Initiative for the 1990's adequately address the scope and guidance required to administer the 1040 program? If not what is your recommendation for improvement?
- 3. What Technical References are you using to administer the 1040 program? Are they current? If not how would you prioritize updating these documents?
- 4. Are your DSDs and/or State Director being kept current on the status and accomplishments of the 1040 program? If yes, how are you keeping them current? What feedback have you received?
- 5. How are you coordinating the 1040 program work with other programs? For example wildlife/fisheries/T&E/plant conservation, soil/water/air, range/WH&B/forestry/recreation/oil & gas/and planning?
- 6. Does your state have a strategic plan for prioritizing riparian program work? If yes, please elaborate.
- 7. What is the greatest need and the highest priority work for the Riparian Program? For example, project planning, updating RMPs, grazing permits, Interdisciplinary Team participation (technical skills), monitoring (evaluating the effectiveness of management decisions).
- 8. How have you used Land Use Plans to set goals and objectives for management of riparian resources?
- 9. In your opinion, what are the training needs for the riparian resource staff in your state?
- 10. What riparian related assistance has the FO requested from the SO in the past two years?
- 11. Are you collecting data to support or update your PFC assessments? If not, why not?
- 12. Are the field offices adequately monitoring riparian areas? If not, what is your recommendation for improvement?

Creeks and Communities Strategy, NRST, State Teams and Agency Coordinators:

- 1. How well do you understand the interagency Creeks and Communities Strategy? Do you use the principles and practices when you conduct PFC assessments?
- 2. Are your DSDs and/or State Director being kept current on the status and accomplishments of the Creeks and Communities Strategy? If yes, how are you keeping them current? What feedback have you received?

What is the working relationship among and how often do you call on each of the following?

State Riparian Teams?

Agency Riparian Coordinators?

NRST?

3. The NRST provides services that address both the technical and social services dimensions. Some examples are; assessment and monitoring within an adaptive management framework, confronting and managing conflict, fostering participation and problem solving by diverse interests and offering advice and review on a variety of issues and products. How frequently do you request these services? What services are most important to you?

Technical transfer?

Building capacity for collaborative stewardship?

Training?

Consulting and/or advisory services?

Program review and/or evaluation?

- 4. What is your overall perception of the products and services provided by the NRST that support the riparian program in BLM?
- 5. What products or services could be provided by the NRST to better support the BLM riparian program?
- 6. What products or services could be provided by the State Riparian Team to better support the BLM riparian program?

Data:

- 1. Do you have confidence in the quality of the PFC assessments in your state? If not, why not?
- 2. How is the riparian data (inventory, assessment and monitoring data) being stored at the state office? Field office?
- 3. What percentage of your PFC data is available in an electronic format?
- 4. If PFC data is not currently available in an electronic format, what efficiencies would be gained if this data was readily available?

5. What priority would you place on developing a riparian data system to capture current and legacy data? Would you be willing to help fund the development of this system?

Additional Comments:

<u>Appendix B: Questions regarding BLM's Riparian Program and the Creeks and Communities</u> Strategy - Field Office Leads

Program Management:

- 1. In your own words, how would you define success for the 1040 program? In 2009? By 2014?
- 2. Do the current policies and procedures as stated in Manual 1737 and the Riparian Initiative for the 1990's adequately address the scope and guidance required to administer the 1040 program? If not what is your recommendation for improvement?
- 3. What Technical References are you using to administer the 1040 program? Are they current? If not how would you prioritize updating these documents?
- 4. Is your line manager and/or FO manager being kept current on the status and accomplishments of the riparian program? If yes, how are you keeping them current? What feedback have you received? How does your FM promote the riparian program?
- 5. For example, wildlife/fisheries/T&E/plant conservation, soil/water/air, range, WH&B, forestry, recreation, oil and gas, and planning? How are you coordinating the 1040 program work with other programs? For example with wildlife/fisheries/T&E/plant conservation, soil/water/air, range, WH&B, forestry, recreation, oil and gas and planning?
- 6. Does your state have a strategic plan for prioritizing riparian program work? If yes, how is it helpful?
- 7. What is the greatest need and the highest priority work for the Riparian Program? For example, project planning, updating RMPs, grazing permits, Interdisciplinary Team participation (technical skills), monitoring (evaluating the effectiveness of management decisions).
- 8. How have you used Land Use Plans to set goals and objectives for management of riparian resources?

- 9. Are the results of PFC assessments driving changes in livestock grazing terms and conditions? If so give a recent example.
- 10. In your opinion, what are the training needs for the riparian program in your FO staff?
- 11. Are you collecting data to support or update your PFC assessments? If not, why not?
- 12. Does your FO have sufficient skills/technical training to mange a riparian program? If not, what skills are needed and are they available through the state team or the NRST?
- 13. Is your office adequately monitoring riparian areas? If not, what is your recommendation for improvement?

Creeks and Communities Strategy, NRST, State Teams and Agency Coordinators:

- 1. How well do you understand the interagency Creeks and Communities Strategy? Do you use the principles and practices when you conduct PFC assessments?
- 2. Is your line manager and/or FO manager being kept current on the status and accomplishments of the Creeks and Communities Strategy? If yes, how are you keeping them current? What feedback have you received?
- 3. The NRST provides services that address both the technical and social services dimensions. Some examples are; assessment and monitoring within an adaptive management framework, confronting and managing conflict, fostering participation and problem solving by diverse interests and offering advice and review on a variety of issues and products. How frequently do you request these services? What services are most important to you?

Technical transfer?

Building capacity for collaborative stewardship?

Training?

Consulting and/or advisory services?

Program review and/or evaluation?

- 4. How do you use the state team? How do you use the NRST?
- 5. What is your overall perception of the products and services provided by the NRST that support the riparian program in your FO?
- 6. What products or services could be provided by the NRST to better support your FO riparian program?

Data:

1. What riparian data are you collecting, e.g. text, tabular, GIS, maps? How is this information being used at the FO level?

- 2. What percent (approximate) of the riparian stream segments in your FO have had PFC conducted on them within the past 5 years? The past 10 years? The past 20 years?
- 3. What percent (approximate) of the riparian stream segments in your FO that are functioning at risk or not functioning are being monitored through MIM or another monitoring method?
- 4. How is your riparian data being stored?
- 5. What percentage of your PFC data is available in an electronic format?
- 6. If PFC data is not currently available in an electronic format, what efficiencies would be gained if this data was readily available?

Additional Comments: